Chapter 3

Gramsci and the Intellectuals: Modern Prince Vs Passive Revolution

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Gramsci is the Marxist theorist *par excellence* of the Intellectuals. Marx and Engels sketched out perspectives for a theory of the social position and efficacy of intellectuals with their analysis of the historical emergence of the division of labour and critique of the deleterious role of 'ideologists' as (conscious or unconscious) defenders of the status quo (most notably, in the *German Ideology*). The *Communist Manifesto* went on to note the class transition of certain types of intellections in periods of revolutionary upheaval. However, writing before the Dreyfus affair in which the term 'Intellectual' was established for the first time as a key word of modern political discourse, Marx and Engels did not offer a comprehensive theory of the structural role of intellectuals in modern societies. Other Marxists have developed themes related to specific aspects of the question of the intellectuals. Brecht's entire intellectual practice, for example, can be regarded as developing a multi-faceted aethetico-philosophical meditation on the potentials for *eingreifendes Denken* (intervening thought) by a new type of intellectual engaged in a practice of dialectical pedagogy; Sartre, from a different perspective, saw the contradictions between the class origins of a certain types of intellectual and their ostensible commitment to truth as being resolved in practices of political commitment and solidarity; Critical Theory, in varying forms, from Adorno and Horkheimer to

Marcuse to Habermas, posited the intellectual as the privileged site of critique and repository of the best elements of the Marxist tradition in an epoch dominated by the failure of the revolutionary project and the emergence of an increasingly totalitarian and repressive post war society. No other theorist, however, whether consciously affiliated to the Marxist tradition or not, has offered such comprehensive theorisations of the question of the intellectuals as Gramsci, ranging from detailed historical analyses of their emergence and function in modern societies, their economic and political determinations and their relation to other social practices and categories. These are all united within not only a proposal for the future development of Marxist theory and politics, but a new definition of the historical determinateness and political efficacy of all philosophy and intellectual practice. Viewed from this perspective, we could go beyond the initial affirmation of this essay and declare Gramsci to be *the* theorist of the intellectuals *tout court*.

Within Anglophone Marxism, the most visible of Gramsci's formulations regarding intellectuals have undoubtedly been the categories of the traditional and organic intellectuals. Following upon the 1971 publication of *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (the first volume to make a significant number of Gramsci's carceral researches widely available in English in a thematically organised form, including a section dedicated to the theme of the intellectuals), these categories were diffused throughout Anglophone Marxism and the broader Anglophone intellectual culture as a central element of what Chantel Mouffe described in 1979 as the reign of '"gramscism"' (Mouffe 1979: 1). Cultural Studies, in particular, lying at the crossroads of the Anglophone humanities and social sciences, benefited from the reception of Gramsci at a

moment when it was entering a consolidating, institutional phase of development. As Stuart Hall has noted on numerous occasions, Gramsci's category of the organic intellectual, and his own personal example, seemed to offer the fledgling discipline a model for the integration of political commitment with a serious intellectual research project (Hall 1992: 281).

More recently, Gramsci's theorisations of the intellectuals have been challenged by alternative approaches with more tangential relations to the Marxist tradition. The concept of the 'specific intellectual', for example, associated with Deleuze and Foucault, has been widely perceived as more useful for grasping the disciplinary and control procedures of the neo-liberal new world order (Cf. Foucault 1980: 128); one particularly influential cultural studies critic has gone so far as to argue for 'Foucault's much greater "useability" [than Gramsci's] in the contexts in which, today, intellectual work has and needs to be done' (Bennett 1998: 62). Nevertheless, in a period in which the wisdom of the rash dismissal of Gramsci along with all things Marxist as 'superannuated' is slowly beginning to be questioned, it may perhaps be timely and salutary to return to the letter of Gramsci's texts with a view to determining the continuing relevance of his researches for contemporary politics and social theory. Such a return necessarily involves placing Gramsci's treatment of the question of the intellectuals within the overarching structure of the theoretical laboratory of the *Prison Notebooks*, as the horizon within which their integral meaning becomes visible.[1] For 'the intellectuals' constitute not merely one theme indifferently arranged alongside others which can be untimely ripped from their context without significant conceptual loss. On the contrary, Gramsci's theorisation of the role of intellectuals in modern societies constitutes the point of departure for his initial historical

researches, and occupies a central theoretical position in his subsequent reformulation of the fundamentally political status of philosophy within the Marxist *Weltanschauung*. The full significance of categories such as the traditional and organic intellectuals, therefore, only becomes apparent when they are considered in the context of both the historical conjuncture and the theoretical problematic in which they emerged, and to which they were designed as concrete political responses.

The guiding thread that organises all of Gramsci's carceral researches can be succinctly characterised as *the search for an adequate theory of proletarian hegemony in the epoch of the 'organic crisis', or 'passive revolution', of the bourgeois 'integral state'*. Gramsci appropriated the concept of 'passive revolution' from Vincenzo Cuoco. He transformed it, in the first instance, in order to provide an analysis of the distinctive features of the Italian *Risorgimento* (Q1, 44).[2] However, it soon became clear to Gramsci that the concept could have a more general significance and be used to indicate the road to modernity taken by those nation states lacking in the radical-popular 'Jacobin moment' which had distinguished the experience of the French revolution and, further, to signify the particular pacifying and incorporating nature assumed by bourgeois hegemony in the epoch of imperialism. As Domenico Losurdo has argued, 'Beginning with the defeat of the workers and popular classes in June 1848 and further with that of 1871, a phase of passive revolution begins, identifiable neither with the counterrevolution nor, even less, with the political and ideological fall of the dominant class. The category of passive revolution is a category used in the *Prison Notebooks* in order to denote the persistent capacity of initiative of the bourgeoisie which succeeds, even in the historical phase in which it has ceased to be a properly revolutionary class, to produce socio-political

transformations, sometimes of significance, conserving securely in its own hands power, initiative and hegemony, and leaving the working classes in their condition of subalternality' (Losurdo 1997: 155).[3] 'Wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born'[4]: if the bourgeois passive revolution of Gramsci's time was still able to produce limited forms of historical progress, its logic of disintegration, molecular transformation, absorption and incorporation nevertheless remained dedicated to one goal: prevention of the cathartic moment[5] in which the subaltern classes cross the Rubicon separating a merely 'economic-corporative' phase from a truly 'hegemonic' phase. In other words, the goal of the passive revolution was to stop the subaltern social layers from becoming a genuine class, agent and actor within history.[6]

This policy of 'permanent structural adjustment' *avant la lettre* was thrown into crisis by the Russian Revolution of 1917, whose significance was immediately understood by the young Gramsci, famously saluting it as '*The Revolution against "Capital"'*. In so far as the Soviets demonstrated the return of a concrete possibility of an alternative modernity to that of a continual passive revolution by a degenerating bourgeoisie, it necessarily produced a crisis of confidence in existing regimes and gave stimulus to subaltern movements on an international scale. This was particularly the case in the two Western European countries in which passive revolution had been the rule rather than the exception for social transformation and modernisation in the later half of the nineteenth century, Italy and Germany, both immediately wracked by profound social and political upheavals. The subsequent rise of Fascism in Italy and the crushing of the revolutionary workers' movement in the Weimar republic (ultimately paving the way for the emergence of National Socialism) were essentially attempts to manage this crisis by

exaggerating and intensifying the logic of the pre-antediluvian status quo (acceleration of 'revolution' from above, closer integration of the state and civil society society, abolition of previous limited forms of independent political expression and organisation of subaltern groups). If these reactionary movements succeeded in rebuffing a combatative workers' movement, they nevertheless introduced elements of risk, division and explicit conflict into the passive revolutionary project that destabilised its fundamental presuppositions. Indeed, the very 'success' of Fascist reaction intensified the structural crisis of bourgeois hegemony, producing an *Ausnahmezustand* (state of exception) which would not be resolved with a return to the dull compulsion of (relatively) stable parliamentary and institutional incorporation until after WWII, when the various national bourgeoisies had marched their respective working classes through rivers of blood. Gramsci's response to this crisis, from the years of *Ordine nuovo* in the Turin workers' movement, through the founding years of the PCI, his intense polemics with Bordiga and direct involvement in the work of the International, to the early years of the still fragile Fascist regime, right up until his imprisonment and his final precarceral text (*The Southern Question*), was of a singular and consistent nature. He attempted to translate one of the central terms of the Russian revolutionary experience and Lenin's political theory and practice in particular – to wit, that of *gegemoniya* (hegemony) – into a theory adequate to grasp the specific conditions obtaining in the West and to construct the forms of proletarian hegemony suitable for overthrowing them. This remained the *leit-motif* of the entire *Prison Notebooks*' project, despite or because of its (only seemingly) fragmentary nature; but when Gramsci begins to write his first notebook in 1929, over 2 years after his initial arrest, it was developed within a new theoretical problematic which

had a decisive significance for grasping the political function of the intellectuals and the distinctive nature of proletarian hegemony.

'Formation of the groups of Italian intellectuals: development, attitudes (*atteggiamenti*)' was the third theme which Gramsci wrote in his first prison notebook (on the 8th February 1929) (Significantly, it had been immediately proceeded by the theme, 'Development of the Italian bourgeoisie until 1870').[7] In the early phases of his research, Gramsci continually returns to the theme of the intellectuals from various perspectives, including those derived from previous researches in the Marxist tradition into the general consequences of the division of labour and the deleterious role of 'ideologists/ideologues' (under the rubric of Lorianism – cf. in particular Q1, 31 –63). Nevertheless, his central concern in these early notebooks remained the same as that of *The Southern Question*: a determination of the historical and structural specificity of the Italian nation state, the combined and uneven development of Italian capitalism (particularly between the industrial north and the still predominantly rural south), consequent formation of distinct types of intellectuals within the Italian social formation (Q3, 39), and absence of radical-popular 'Jacobin' moment producing an organic fusion between the people and intellectuals (who had remained, by and large, in the cosmopolitan role descending from the Renaissance (Q3, 63)). From the outset Gramsci announced the perspective which shaped all of his considerations on the question of the intellectuals: 'The term intellectual must be taken to mean not only those social strata who are traditionally termed intellectuals, but in general the whole social mass that performs functions of organization in the broad sense: whether in the realm of production, culture or public administration: they correspond to the non-commissioned

officers and to the lower ranks of officers in the army' (QI, 43).[8] Later, he added the following central formulation: 'The intellectuals have the function of organising the social hegemony of a group and its domination at the level of the state, that is, the consensus given by the prestige of their function in the productive world and the apparatus of coercion for those groups which neither actively nor passively "consent", or for those moments of crisis of command and of leadership in which spontaneous consent suffers a crisis. From this analysis there results a very large extension of the concept of the intellectuals, but only in this way does it seem to me to be possible to arrive at a concrete approximation to reality' (Q4, 49).

This expanded concept of the intellectuals is symptomatic of and can only be understood within a new theoretical problematic, progressively clarified throughout the *Prison Notebooks* but present from the outset: that of the 'integral state'.[9] The initial stimulus for this 'expanded' definition of the state was Gramsci's well-known characterisation of the differential times of (bourgeois) state formation in the Russia and Western Europe: 'In the East, the state was everything, civil society was primitive and gelatinous; in the West there was a just relation between state and civil society and in the trembling of the state one noticed immediately a robust structure of civil society' (Q7, 16). It soon became clear to Gramsci, however, that an adequate comprehension of this 'just relation' required an expanded concept of the state *as such*, the higher, more advanced form making visible the secret anatomy of the lower. This expanded concept of the state was crucial for grasping the distinctive logic of the passive revolution, its persistent, structural capacity for incorporating subaltern energies, limiting them to merely 'economic-corporative' moments within the existing institutions and preventing

them from progressing to their own political (that is, potentially hegemonic) forms. According to this concept, the state (in its integral form) was not to be limited to the machinery of government and legal institutions (the state understood in a strict or limited sense, 'political society', in opposition to 'civil society'). Rather, the concept of the integral state was intended as a dialectical unity of the moments of both civil society and political society, an 'historical block' of the base and the superstructures[10], the terrain upon which social classes compete for social and political leadership or hegemony over other social classes; a hegemony guaranteed, 'in the last instance', by capture of the legal monopoly of violence embodied in the institutions of political society.[11] 'The State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules' (Q 15, 10). Within such an integral state, in the institutions of civil society where hegemony is contested just as much as those of political society where it is consolidated and guaranteed, the intellectuals of opposed social classes play a decisive role (varying according to the particular nature of that class's hegemony) of leadership, articulation of interests and coordination of initiatives of the ideologies which arise upon a given mode of production and are the forms in which 'men become conscious of this conflict [between classes] and fight it out' (MECW 29, 262).[12] There is no 'organisation without intellectuals', Gramsci declared (Q 11, 12), thereby raising the implicit question of the particular types of intellectual corresponding to particular types of organisation.

The expanded concept of the intellectuals within an expanded concept of the state had two important consequences. First, it permitted Gramsci to resist a reductive economistic analysis of the question of intellectuals based upon their class background (a

tendency which has not been absent in certain traditions within Marxism, particularly in its Stalinist and Maoist formations). Rather, he comprehended the intellectuals on the basis of their actual function in the reigning relations of production and their political correlates. 'He comprehended them not primarily from the circuit of capital as a professional group or according to the measure of their self-image as great intellectual heroes, but rather, under the aspect of their organising function in the ensemble of social relations and division of labour' (Demirovic and Jehle 1268-9). Gramsci's class analysis of the intellectuals was therefore of a fundamentally political nature: intellectuals may be determined, in the first instance, by their position in the relations of production (though in a highly mediated form)[13], but their class position *qua* their social function as intellectuals is only realised to the extent to which they are 'organically' fused with the political aspirations of a class, rather than deduced from their personal class origins.

Second, with the emphasis upon social and political organisation rather than specific intellectual activity, Gramsci explicitly rejected a theory according to which intellectuals form an homogenous social group distinct from social classes, or even an independent class. 'The intellectuals do not form an independent class, but each class has its intellectuals' (Q 1, 44).[14] Rather than a horizontal relation between intellectuals across classes, Gramsci argued that there existed a vertical organisation of intellectuals of varying ability and efficacy (and varying degrees of political consciousness of their roles) within classes, according to the previously quoted metaphor drawn from the ranks of military officers. This vertical relation extends across the (artificial) division between political society and civil society, so that there is a closer relation between intellectuals of the same class performing seemingly distinct functions, than there is between

intellectuals of different classes engaged in similar activities.[15] If a horizontal relationship predominated within the logic of the passive revolution, 'an atmosphere of solidarity of all intellectuals' (Q1, 44), this was to be explained as a function of the hegemonic position of one class, subordinating and exerting influence on all other subaltern social layers, including their intellectuals.

It is in the context of this multi-faceted analysis that the categories of the traditional and organic intellectuals receive their meaning. In both instances, Gramsci highlights the intimate relation between these figures and transformations of the mode of production, but, equally, stresses that they are subject to a decisive *political* mediation. Thus, if 'Every social group, born on the original terrain of an essential function in the world of economic production, creates at the same time organically one or more ranks of intellectuals', it is nevertheless the case that such organic intellectuals of the new class gain their 'homogeneity and consciousness of their own function' – that is, become genuinely organic to the new class *qua* class – 'not only in the economic, but also in the social and political field' (Q12, 1 – A text, Q4, 49). However, both the constitutively intellectual and political nature of these organic intellectuals' activity, *qua* intellectuals and *qua* organisers of their class, was usually obscured, according to Gramsci, by an already existing intellectual order. 'But every "essential" social group, emerging into history from the preceding economic structure and as an expression of its (i.e. this structure's) development, has found, at least up until now, pre-existing social categories which appear as representatives of an historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical transformations of social and political forms' (Q 12, 1). These 'traditional intellectuals' were in fact the organic intellectuals of a previously emergent

and now consolidated and dominant social class, unwilling, at best, or, at worst, unable, to recognise their continuing political function. (Gramsci's immediate reference was the situation of the intellectuals of the Catholic Church in Italy, seemingly independent of social classes, but originally 'organically linked to the large land owning sections of the aristocracy'). 'Since these various categories of traditional intellectuals feel with an "*esprit de corp*"' their uninterrupted historical continuity and their "qualification", they posit themselves as autonomous and independent from the dominant social group' (Q 12, 1). A preliminary political task of the organic intellectuals of an emerging social group, therefore, was to contest the prestige enjoyed by the traditional intellectuals, the projection of their own image as that of the intellectuals *tout court*. It was by means of this that they posited their own specific activities and priorities as defining the very nature of intellectual activity and its location in the social relations as such (thus Gramsci's continual insistence upon the criteria of organisation and social function for defining the intellectuals, rather than the nature of intellectual activity).

Such was the condition confronted by the new organic intellectuals of the workers' movement in Gramsci's Italy, in a culture dominated by the traditional intellectual Benedetto Croce. Croce seemed to be elevated up into some Olympian zone above the fray of immediate politics where his 'philosophy of freedom' patiently and inexorably elaborated itself – the all too finite evidence of fascist reaction and regression notwithstanding. Such was Croce's and similar figures' dominance of the terrain of 'intellectuality' that it had become difficult even to recognise the organic intellectuals of an emerging but still subaltern social class as 'intellectuals' at all. Gramsci comprehended this element of Croce's seemingly 'merely' intellectual practice

politically. Albeit in a highly mediated form, Croce's organisation of an intellectual order claiming its autonomy from immediate politics in fact played an important role in guaranteeing the continuance of contemporary bourgeois hegemony. By means of its established prestige and consequent power of attraction for new initiatives, Croce's doctrines produced 'perhaps the greatest quantity of "gastric juices" to assist the process of digestion. Set in its historical context, the context of Italian history, Croce's work appears to be the most powerful mechanism for "conforming" the new forces to its vital interests (not simply its immediate interests, but its future ones as well) that the dominant group possesses, and I think that the later has a proper appreciation of his utility, superficial appearances notwithstanding' (quoted in Buci-Glucksmann 1980: 21). Croce was not merely 'a constructor of ideologies for governing others' (ibid.); with his dominance of the definitions of intellectual practice, he was a 'realiser of the passive revolution' (Frosini 2003: 56), actively preventing others from constructing ideologies in order to govern themselves.

Armed with his concept of the integral state as the terrain on which competing classes contested for social and political hegemony, however, Gramsci was well placed to understand the transformation of these once organic intellectuals into traditional intellectuals and their subsequent dominance of definitions of intellectual activity as themselves products and symptoms of the hegemony of the class whose interests they served and organised (whether consciously or not). They were the necessary complements, at the level of social agents, of the 'speculative' phase of thought which accompanied the achieved hegemony of a social class, the form in which a class refined its 'ideology' (intimately bound to its current class interests) and presented it as

'philosophy' (generally valid, across class boundaries, and with a purchase on the future). At a decisive moment in the *Prison Notebooks* (in Notebook 11, the notebook in which Gramsci presented his most detailed proposal for a 'philosophy of praxis'), Gramsci posed two questions which redefined the nature of philosophy as the *Weltanschauung* of a class, and thus, also, the status of those whose task it was to organise and diffuse such a *Weltanschauung* in the concrete forms of the various superstructures.

> 1. Is the 'speculative' element essential to every philosophy, is it the form itself which every theoretical construction as such must assume, that is, is 'speculation' a synonym for philosophy and theory?
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> 2. Or must the question be posed 'historically': the problem is only an historical problem and not a theoretical one in the sense that every conception of the world, in a determinate historical phase, assumes a 'speculative' form which represents its apogee and the beginning of its dissolution? Analogy and connection with the development of the state, which passes from the 'economic-corporative' phase to the 'hegemonic' phase (of [active] consent). It can be said that every culture has its speculative or religious moment, which coincides with the period of complete hegemony of the social group which it expresses, and maybe coincides precisely with the moment in which the real hegemony is dissolved at the base, molecularly, but the system of thought, precisely because of that (in order to react to the break-up) is perfected dogmatically … Criticism must therefore resolve

speculation into its real terms of political ideology, of an instrument of practical action' (Q 11, 53).

In order for the workers' movement to counter the logic of the bourgeois passive revolution, it needed to elaborate its own hegemonic apparatus, within the relations of production as well as in the superstructures, a hegemonic apparatus not merely antagonistic to that of the bourgeoisie, but really distinct from it, in a relation of real contradiction. At the level of philosophy, this involved opposing the ruling class's restricted, speculative 'owl of Minerva' with a new conception of philosophy, posed in 'realistic' and 'concrete historical' terms capable of a wide diffusion among all subaltern layers: a 'philosophy of praxis' oriented to the future and a new social order. At the level of the intellectuals, those whose role it was to articulate and organise such a new popular *Weltanschauung*, it called for the creation of a qualitatively new type of intellectual which would be both adequate to the specific tasks of the emerging class, and capable of exercising hegemony on the terrain of 'intellectuality' over and against the already established traditional intellectuals of the dominant class. 'The assimilation and "ideological" conquest of the traditional intellectuals', Gramsci argued, will be 'quicker and more effective the more the given group elaborates simultaneously its own organic intellectuals' (Q 12, 1). The elaboration of these intellectuals, Gramsci repeatedly acknowledged (e.g. Q 4, 55), would involve a long and tortuous process, for reasons both internal to the political development of the working class movement in its totality (structurally consigned to a subaltern position within the bourgeois state, its own distinctive group of intellectuals would be developed only insofar as the class as a whole

struggled to emerge from its 'economic-corporative' phase and exercise genuine class-based hegemony), and because of the power of attraction and incorporation exercised by the 'organic intellectuals of the passive revolution' through their dominance of the existing intellectual order.

Nevertheless, the question remained: what would be the nature of these organic intellectuals, the features which would distinguish them from the existing traditional intellectuals and permit them both to exercise hegemony within the intellectual order (thus neutralising the role played by figures such as Croce as organisers of the passive revolution in the superstructures) and to make an adequate contribution to the distinctive social forms which would be necessary to forge proletarian hegemony? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to consider an alternative line of historical and theoretical research that had accompanied Gramsci's consideration of the question of the intellectuals from the beginning of the *Prison Notebooks*. Central to this had been Gramsci's condemnation of the enduring cosmopolitanism of the Italian intellectuals and their failure to assist in forging a national-popular unity – the absence in the Italian *Risorgimento* of the 'Jacobin moment' that distinguished the French Revolution. Gramsci traced this failure back to the particular model of intellectuality that had emerged in the Renaissance, counterposing it to the more thoroughly popular experience of the Reformation.[16] Occurring earlier, the (Italian) Renaissance had elaborated a sophisticated intellectual culture superior to that which accompanied the later (Germanic) Reformation, a more popular experience of spiritual and moral reform which only much later, in German Idealism (and, ultimately, Gramsci suggested, in its transformation in the Marxist tradition), had generated a comparably sophisticated higher intellectual order

(c.f. Q4, 3). The Renaissance, however, for all of its strengths, had not been able to establish any organic relation with the masses, either before its heyday or after; when intellectuals formed in that tradition were confronted by the emergence of the Reformation, their attitude was one of detachment and incomprehension (Gramsci's continual reference was Erasmus's condemnation of Luther: '*ubicumque regnat lutheranismus, ibi literarum est interitus*' (Q 4, 3; Q16, 3, i).

This was precisely the tradition of intellectuality continued, in a modified form, during the *Risorgimento* in nineteenth century and by Croce in the early twentieth. Their relationship to the masses necessarily remained 'bureaucratic' and 'formal; they were structurally incapable of making the transition from knowledge (*sapere*) to comprehension (*comprendere*) to feeling (*sentire*), and vice versa; 'the intellectuals become a caste or priesthood (organic centralism)' (Q 4, 33). In effect, they were the 'specific intellectuals' of their own time, remaining on the terrain of 'technique' and unable to progress to a political comprehension of their social function of leadership and organisation. Viewed in an historical perspective, Gramsci argued, these intellectuals were the modern inheritors, in a suitably laical form, of the relationship of merely formal unity between the intellectuals and the masses established by the Roman Catholic Church. In this case, the intellectuals had been seen as custodians of ideas (theology), enjoying the privilege of certain innovations within doctrinal limits, while the masses were denied any active participation in the social intellectual order, left in their condition of retarded development, superstition and prejudice (Q 11, 12, iii).[17] Similarly, for the organic intellectuals of the passive revolution and particularly in Croce's philosophic system, the intellectuals were responsible for the various moments of truth,

comprehended under the concept of 'philosophy'; to the masses was left only 'ideology', compromised by its involvement in practical affairs.[18]

The new organic intellectuals and new intellectual order envisaged by Gramsci broke decisively with this tradition. For the intellectuals organically linked to the proletariat's hegemonic project, it did not suffice to make 'individual "original" discoveries'; rather, their role was much more one of being 'permanent persuaders' (Q 4, 72 – Q12, 3), critically diffusing already discovered 'truths' as the basis for a new society (Q 11, 12). They attained their status as intellectuals not as specialists in any particular field of knowledge, but rather, as 'leaders' (Q4, 72), or 'organisers of a new culture' (Q 12, 1). 'The position of the philosophy of praxis is antithetical to this Catholic [position]', and thus, implicitly, also to that of Croce and similar figures. It 'doesn't tend to leave the "simple people" in their primitive philosophy of common sense, but rather, to leadt them to a superior conception of life. If it affirms the exigency of contact between the intellectuals and the simple people, it is not in order to limit scientific activity and in order to maintain a unity at a low level of the masses, but precisely in order to construct an intellectual-moral block that renders politically possible a mass intellectual progress and not only of small groups of intellectuals' (Q 11, 12, iii). Whereas the traditional intellectuals contributed to the passive revolution by denying to the masses the access to the intellectual resources they needed in order to engage in an expanding dialectic of activity and consciousness, these permanent persuaders would find their intellectual resources precisely in their organic integration with the masses, in a reciprocal relationship of 'democratic pedagogy' in which the intellectuals would be at least as often 'the educated' as 'the educators'[19]. They would be intellectuals who were 'organically the

intellectuals of these masses', working out and making coherent the principles and problems which the masses had posed in their own practical activity, and thus building a cultural and historical block (Q 11, 12, iii).[20]

Gramsci famously characterised this cultural and historical block, echoing Machiavelli, as a 'modern Prince' (Q 8, 21; Q13, 1), or the fusion of a qualitatively new type of political party and oppositional culture that would gather together intellectuals (organisers) and the masses in a new political and intellectual practice, 'organising the organisers'. Bourgeois hegemony, particularly in the form of the passive revolution, was characterised by a state of continual 'disinformation', deception, pedagogy-as-discipline and exclusion; it was imposed from above and did not aim to reduce the distance between organisers and the organised – on the contrary, it erected institutional and structural barriers to such expansive democratic practice. The 'modern Prince', on the other hand, or the adequate institutional form of proletarian hegemony, was nothing more than an 'active and effective expression' of the process of formation of a 'national-popular collective will' and 'intellectual and moral reform' (Q 8, 21). [21] Intensifying the expansion of the social functions of intellectuals that had occurred in the modern world, it instituted a form of pedagogy-as-democratic practice, continually striving to reduce the distance between its 'intellectuals' and the broader popular masses. At its limit, all members of the 'modern Prince' were to be considered as intellectuals, not merely in the sense that 'there are no non-intellectuals' (Q 12, 3), but in the integral sense that they would all perform the social function of organic intellectuals of their class, that is, 'organisers', 'permanent persuaders', 'constructors of a new and higher form of civilisation'.

Just as its Machiavellian predecessor, Gramsci's 'modern Prince' remained no more than a proposal for the future, not a concrete reality, in his time – and in our own.[22] It is one of the measures of the extent to which Gramsci remains our contemporary that the theory of the intellectuals and the qualitatively new conception of intellectual practice that he forged in a Fascist prison cell remain today a horizon for our own intellectual and political practice in the epoch of neo-liberal passive revolution. For whatever the substantial differences between Gramsci's theoretical, political and cultural contexts and our own, his insights into the forms of a possible proletarian hegemony retain today their fertility for further theoretical and practical investigation, awaiting the energies and initiatives of a reviving working class movement which alone will be able to confirm and to transform them in practice. Gramsci's theory of the intellectuals challenges us to take up his necessarily incomplete project: Valorisation of existing intellectual practices organic to the working class movement, organisation of a new intellectual order, diffusion of practices of democratic pedagogy and construction of the institutional forms adequate to their expansion – in short, the formation of a 'modern Prince' on the changed terrain of an aggressive neo-liberal postmodernity.

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[1] In this sense, the commencement of the English translation of Valentino Gerratana's integral critical edition of the *Prison Notebooks* by Joseph Buttigieg in 1992 constituted a landmark in Anglophone Gramscian scholarship. The completion of this ambitious multi-volume undertaking will undoubtedly open a new season of Gramscian scholarship within Anglophone Marxism, richer and subtler than the first because the distinct literary and conceptual challenges of the *Prison Notebooks* will be able to be adequately confronted. As several passages decisive for the present study have not yet been translated in the English critical edition, all quotations have been taken from the Italian critical edition edited by Valentino Gerratana, *Quaderni del carcere*. Translations are my

own. References are to individual notebooks and numbered notes: thus, for example, (Q 12, 1), refers to *quaderno* (notebook) 12, note 1.

[2] Gramsci originally used the term 'revolution without revolution', adding 'passive revolution at a later date in the margins. Elsewhere, he employed the term 'royal conquest' and not 'popular movement' (Q3, 40).

[3] Cf. also the following argument of Pasquale Voza: 'The concept of passive revolution, born as a radical re-elaboration of the expression of Cuoco, is always posited, even when it refers to the *Risorgimento*, as a concept valid for connoting and interpreting the mode of formation of modern states in nineteenth century continental Europe' (Voza 2004: 195).

[4] Matthew Arnold, *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*.

[5] Gramsci's initial discussion of the concept of 'catharsis' took place as a critique of Croce's aesthetics, particularly as Croce deployed it in his reading of the tenth Canto of Dante's *Inferno* (Q 4, 78-88). However, it subsequently became a decisive term in Gramsci's political vocabulary, used to indicate the structural conditions which determine the capacity of a class to emerge from subaltern passivity and elaborate its own concrete political initiatives. 'The term "catharsis" can be employed to indicate the passage from the purely economic (or egoistic-passional) to the ethico-political moment … from being an external force which crushes humans, which assimilates them and makes them passive, the structure is transformed into a means of freedom, into an instrument for the creation of a new ethico-political form, into the origin of new initiatives. Fixing the "cathartic" moment thus becomes, in my view, the point of departure for the whole philosophy of praxis' (Q 10 II, 6).

[6] This was precisely the position of Lenin, one of Gramsci's central points of reference throughout the *Prison Notebooks*: 'From the standpoint of Marxism the class, so long as it renounces the idea of hegemony or fails to appreciate it, is not a class, or not yet a class, but a *guild*, or the sum total of various guilds … It is the consciousness of the idea of hegemony and its implementation through their own activities that converts the guilds as a whole into a class' (Lenin 1963: 231-2).

[7] On the 19th of March 1927, in a letter to Tatiana Sucht, Gramsci had previously listed four themes for further study; in the first position was research into the history of Italy in the nineteenth century, with particular reference to the formation and development of Italian intellectuals.

[8] C.f. Gramsci's famous criterion that 'All men are intellectuals …, but not all men have the function of the intellectuals in society' (Q 12, 1).

[9] For the most comprehensive discussion of the concept of the 'integral state' and the central role of the intellectuals within it, see Buci-Glucksmann (1980), particularly 19-118. Cf. also Rottger (2004). Anderson (1976) is the most well known critique of this concept.

[10] Gramsci comprehended 'the superstructures' (in the plural) in a non-reductive or epiphenomenal sense – that is, he viewed the superstructures not as mechanically derived from an originary 'base', but as constituting a dialectical unity or 'historical block' with the dominant relations of production, the means by which they were organised, guaranteed, and made to endure. This was a central element of his refutation of Croce's critique of Marxism as a not so disguised neo-Platonism for whom the economy was a

type of demiurge. On the theme of Gramsci's critical relation to Croce, see Frosini (2003: 54-6, 123-134).

[11] It is necessary to stress this element, against interpretative traditions, from Italian proponents of an 'historical compromise' to Eurocommunists to contemporary advocates of a nebulously defined radical democracy, which have attempted to confine Gramsci's theory of hegemony to a war of position in the trenches of civil society. It is only within the problematic of the integral state as a dialectial unity of both civil society and the state (understood in a limited sense) that Gramsci's theory of proletarian hegemony becomes comprehensible, as a theory of the political constitution of an alliance of subaltern classes capable of exercising leadership over society and against its class antagonist, necessarily progressing to the dismantling of the state machinery which provides the ultimate (coercive) guarantee for the bourgeoisie's (consensual) hegemony.

[12] Alongside the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Gramsci translated Marx's 1859 *Preface* to the *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* in an early period of his incarceration. It constituted a touchstone throughout the *Prison Notebooks*, a text to which Gramsci continually returned in order to gain new theoretical insights.

[13] 'The relationship between the intellectuals and the world of production is not immediate, as occurs for the fundamental social groups, but is "mediated" in different grades, by the entire social fabric, by the complex of superstructures, of which the intellectuals are precisely the "functionaries"' (Q 12, 1).

[14] Cf. also the following passage: 'In order to analyse the social functions of the intellectuals it is necessary to research and examine their psychological attitude

(*atteggiamento*) toward the great classes that they [the intellectuals] place in contact in diverse fields' (Q 1, 43).

[15] 'The methodological error with the widest diffusion seems to me to be that of seeking this essential characteristic in the intrinsic features of the intellectual activity and not instead in the system of relations in which it (or the grouping which embodies it) is found in the general complex of social relations. In truth: 1) the worker isn't specifically characterised by manual or instrumental labour … but by this labour in determinate conditions and in determinant social relations' (Q 4, 49). Similarly, Gramsci implicitly suggests, the intellectual should not be specifically characterised by intellectual labour, but by the position of this intellectual labour in determinant social relations.

[16] Gramsci made an explicit comparison between the double opposition Renaissance-*Risorgimento*/Reformation-French Revolution on numerous occasions. See for example, the following: 'the Reformation is related to the Renaissance as the French Revolution is to the *Risorgimento*' (Q3, 40).

[17] Gramsci noted another failure to create any organic link between the intellectuals and the masses in previous philosophies of immanence, a philosophic and political limitation which he argued needed to be overcome in the new philosophy of 'absolute immanence', that is, the philosophy of praxis (Q 11, 12).

[18] Gramsci went further and suggested that the limited (and limiting) unity between intellectuals and popular classes of the Catholic Church was in fact superior to the purely bureaucratic relation to popular initiatives implicit in Crocean and modern Italian idealist philosophy (in Gentile's 'actualism', the relation was explicitly secured by the institutions of the Fascist state). The Catholic Church at least attempted to integrate the

lower orders into a (more or less) 'organic unity'; idealist philosophy, on the other hand, contented itself with a merely formal relation to the masses and was unable to elaborate the concrete institutional forms necessary for a genuinely comprehensive *Weltanschauung* – a limitation most noticeable in its failure to challenge the role of religious education in schools.

[19] Gramsci's translation of the *Theses on Feuerbach* in the preparatory phases of researches was decisive for this perspective of democratic pedagogy, the third thesis in particular.

[20] At one stage, Gramsci went so far as to define this new type of intellectual as a 'democratic philosopher' who 'is convinced that his personality is not limited to his own physical individual, but is an active, social relation of transformation of the cultural environment' (Q 10, II, 44).

[21] Valentino Gerratana underlines this aspect of Gramsci's conception of the distinctive nature of proletarian hegemony, noting that 'While for the hegemony of a class that tends to conceal the antagonism of interests it is sufficient to attain a passive and indirect consent – and this is the normal form of political consent in democratic-bourgeois or authoritarian regimes -, in the perspective of the hegemony of the proletariat "it is a question of life and death – Gramsci writes – not passive and indirect consent, but that which is active and direct, the participation therefore of individuals, even if that provokes an appearance of disaggregation and of break-down" (Q 15, 13)' (Gerratana, 1997: 126).

[22] Gramsci's concept of the 'modern Prince' cannot, therefore, be reduced to a mere metaphor for already existing political institutions or parties. Rather, like Machiavelli's 'concrete "phantasy"' (Q 8, 21), it was posited as the non-existing element necessary to

fill the constitutive lack of the present, in order to open it to the future. The political party, Gramsci argued, was the historically given form in which the decisive elements of organisation, unification and coordination had already begun to occur. Its re-elaboration into a non-bureaucratic instrument of proletarian hegemony, however, required an on-going dialectical exchange with the popular initatives from which the modern Prince emerged and into which it sought to intervene. 'The modern Prince, the myth-Prince, cannot be a real person, a concrete individual. It can be only an organism, a social element in which the becoming concrete of a collective will, partially recognised and affirmed in action, has already begun. This organism is already given by historical development; it is the political party, the modern form in which gathers together the partial, collective wills that tend to become universal and total' (Q 8, 21).